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**Wroxeter water main: an
archaeological watching
brief 2003**

Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit



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Wroxeter water main: an archaeological watching brief 2003

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Summary

During June 2003 an archaeological watching brief was carried out by Birmingham Archaeology within the confines of the Roman city of Viroconium, Wroxeter, Shropshire (NGR SJ 566 091). The watching brief was commissioned by Severn Trent Water Limited and the work was undertaken during the process of repair to a burst main, which had failed in late March 2003. The trench was hand-dug and the spoil monitored for artefacts throughout the process. This operation did not impact on the in situ archaeology though a number of finds dating from the Roman period were recovered, including a sherd of Samian ware. It was possible to verify that these artefacts had been redeposited during previous excavations relating to the water main. Despite waterlogging, which obscured the stratigraphy, a possible archaeological horizon was recorded in the section at a depth of 0.35m.

1.0 Introduction

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Birmingham Archaeology in June 2003 within the Roman city of *Viroconium* at Wroxeter, Shropshire. The work was commissioned by Severn Trent Water Limited, and the watching brief was undertaken during the process of repair to a burst main (NGR SJ 566 091, Fig. 1). The project was carried out in accordance with a written scheme of investigation prepared by Birmingham Archaeology and the requirements set down by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA 1999).

2.0 Site background

The site is located *c.* 300 metres to the north of the Roman city of Wroxeter in a pasture field owned by English Heritage. The field was under clover at the time the work was undertaken, and the burst main was located next to the field boundary which runs along the west side of the modern lane, immediately to the east of the field (Fig. 2). The sensitive nature of the landscape surrounding the monument requires that there be close monitoring of any excavation work. There are a variety of sources available that relate to the site and its setting and that locate this specific watching brief site in the northern half of the Roman city, slightly to the south of Bell Brook (Bassett 1990; White 1998; Fig. 3).

3.0 Aims and methods

The aims of the archaeological watching brief were to record any surviving archaeological deposits and features uncovered by excavation prior to the repair of the burst main.

The excavation of a small area *c.* 1.5m x 1.2m was carried out by hand to a depth of 1.1m in total, at which depth the main was suitably exposed and possible to repair. This portion of the work was monitored by a qualified archaeologist. Only the east facing

section of the exposed area could be recorded due to damage caused by waterlogging and the resultant homogeneity of the stratigraphy in the other sections. In addition only the east facing section presented a clean enough profile since the other parts of the excavated area were far more irregularly exposed during removal of spoil. It was possible, subsequent to excavation, for the east facing section to be hand cleaned by trowel and closely observed. In addition, several record photographs in colour print film were taken presenting the nature of the exposure and the section subsequent to cleaning. A 1:10 scale profile drawing was made of the east facing section and was suitably annotated. Recovered artefacts were returned to the Birmingham Archaeology offices where they were cleaned and inspected.

4.0 Results (Fig. 4)

It was almost immediately clear that the water main at this location had been exposed prior to this visit. After removal of the very boggy turf layer the waterlogged brown loamy topsoil (1000) was removed. This was done by hand and necessitated the use of a water pump and compressor at all times.

At a depth of 0.3m plastic sheeting was recovered, specifically a "terram" sheet employed to provide an impermeable membrane during a previous episode of backfilling. Along with this material a selection of sherds of broken roof tile were recovered and a modern steel 0.3m grid peg.

In the east facing section at a depth of 0.35m there appeared evidence of tile and possible brick fragments aligned horizontally (1001). Perhaps alluding to an archaeological horizon. At 0.4m two Roman pot sherds were recovered one of these of Samian ware.

Throughout the remainder of the exposed depth (1002), down to 1.1m, remnants of sandstone tile were observed in addition to one further pot sherd and one piece of animal bone. From a stratigraphic viewpoint the horizon of topsoil overlaying the deposit of tile and brick fragments was not clearly distinguishable from the horizon below it. This was primarily due to waterlogging but probably also owed something to disturbance during primary trenching for the water main, and the subsequent two re-excavations carried out for repair work.

5.0 The finds by Erica Macey

A small quantity of finds was recovered, including pottery, animal bone, roof tile and possible stone tile. The assemblage was fragmentary, possibly having been redeposited following the construction of the water main, and no complete fragments were noted. The assemblage was quantified by count and weight and was examined macroscopically for the purposes of this report. The assemblage poses no long-term storage problems and will be deposited with the remainder of the site archive at the earliest possible opportunity.

The three sherds of pottery recovered were Roman, dating broadly to the 2nd – 4th century AD (Annette Hancocks, pers. comm.) and included a small residual fragment of undecorated Samian.

A fragment of *tegula* with a partial flange and three undiagnostic tile fragments were also recovered, as were four fragments of possible stone tile. The absence of nail holes in the stone tile fragments means that it is difficult to conclusively state that these are tiles, and they may be naturally broken unworked fragments.

6.0 Discussion

Evidence from the sections and spoil revealed that material of Roman period origin had been re-deposited during previous excavation events. It was clear that the repair of the water main did not impact on *in situ* archaeology in the immediate environment. However, it is clear from the existence of nearby Roman streets and associated buildings that close monitoring by a qualified archaeologist would be required for any subsequent work entailing excavation on even this small scale.

7.0 Acknowledgements

The watching brief was carried out by Mark Hewson. Malcolm Hislop managed the project and edited the report. The illustrations were prepared by Nigel Dodds.

8.0 References

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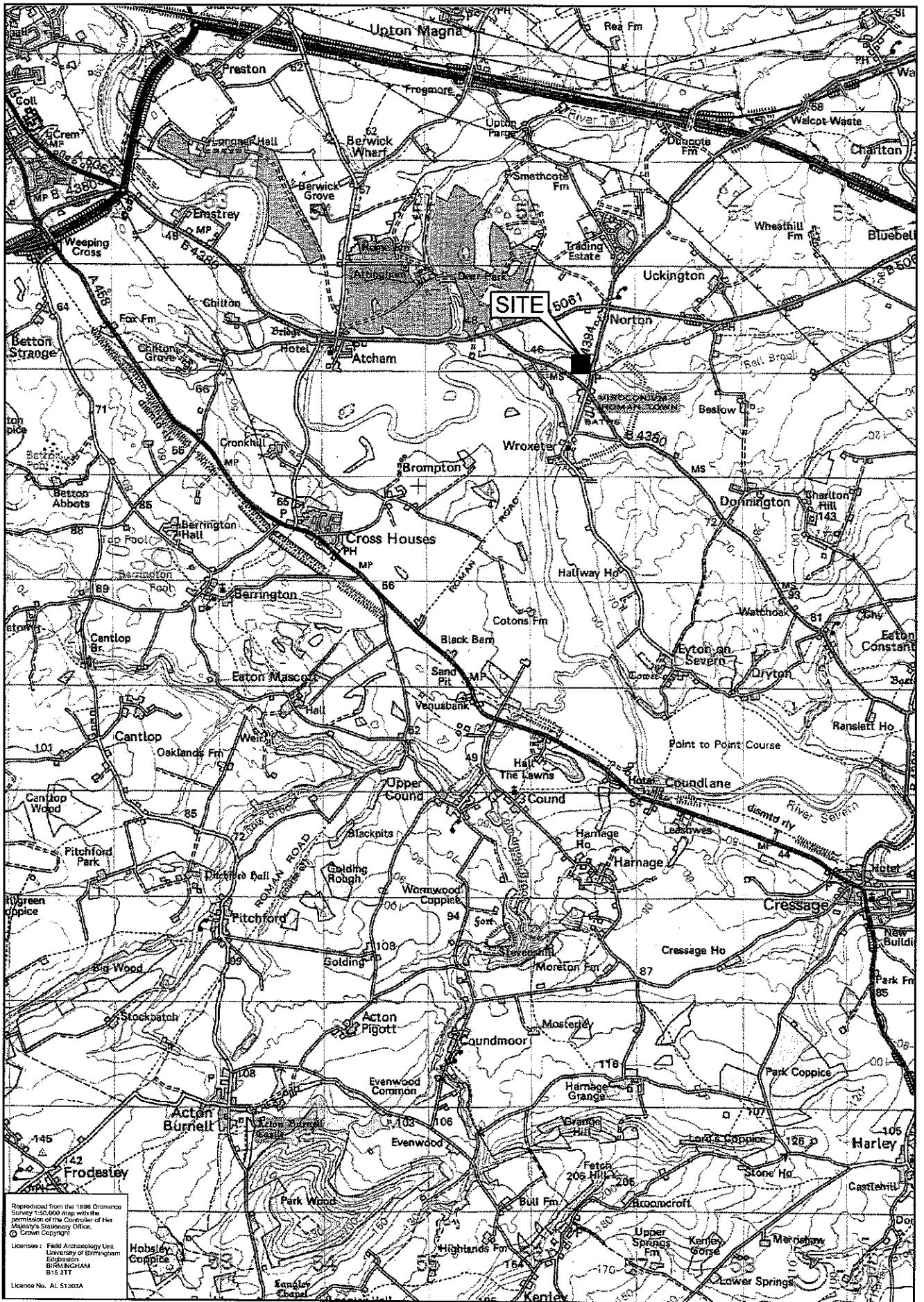


Fig.1

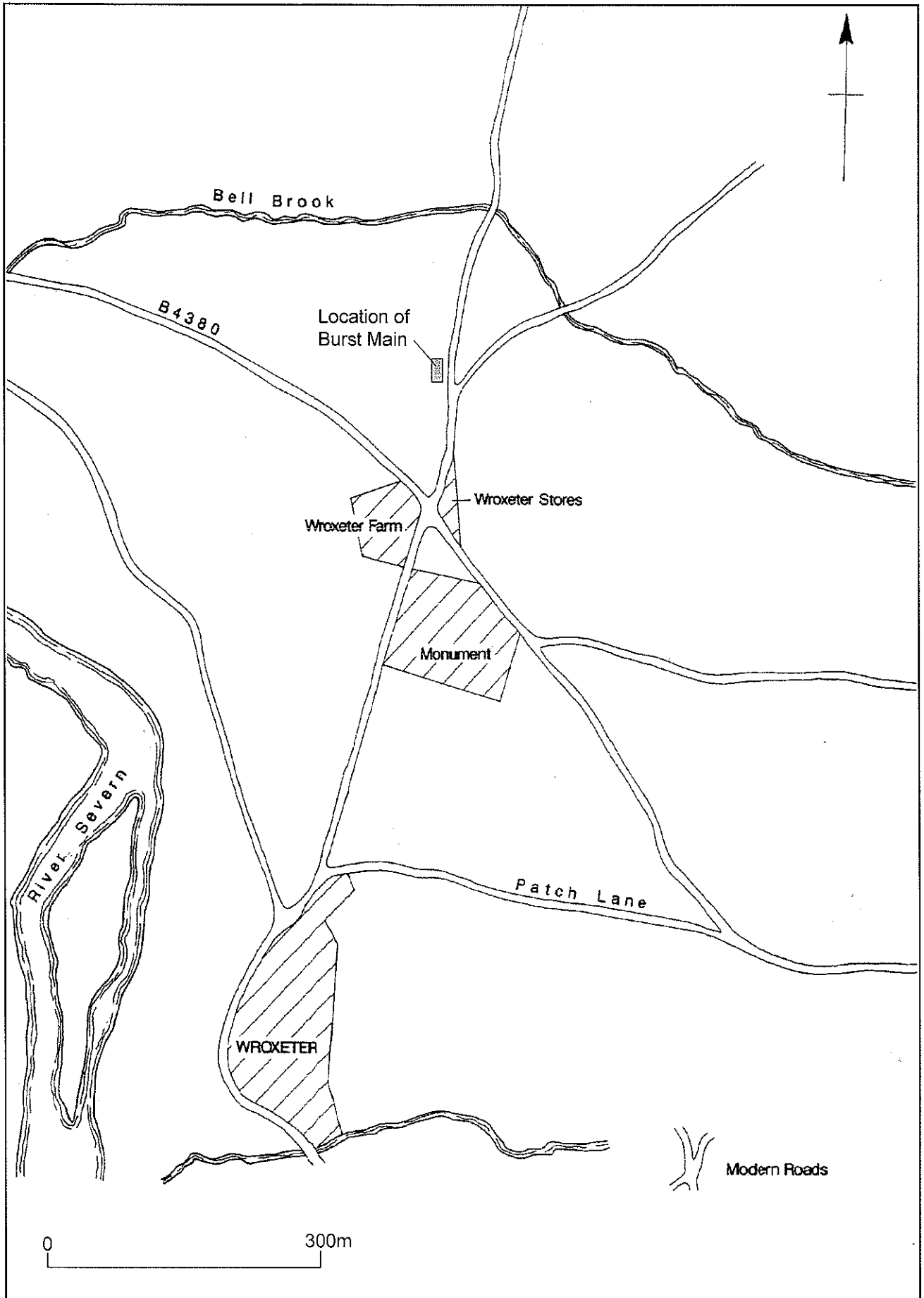


Fig.2

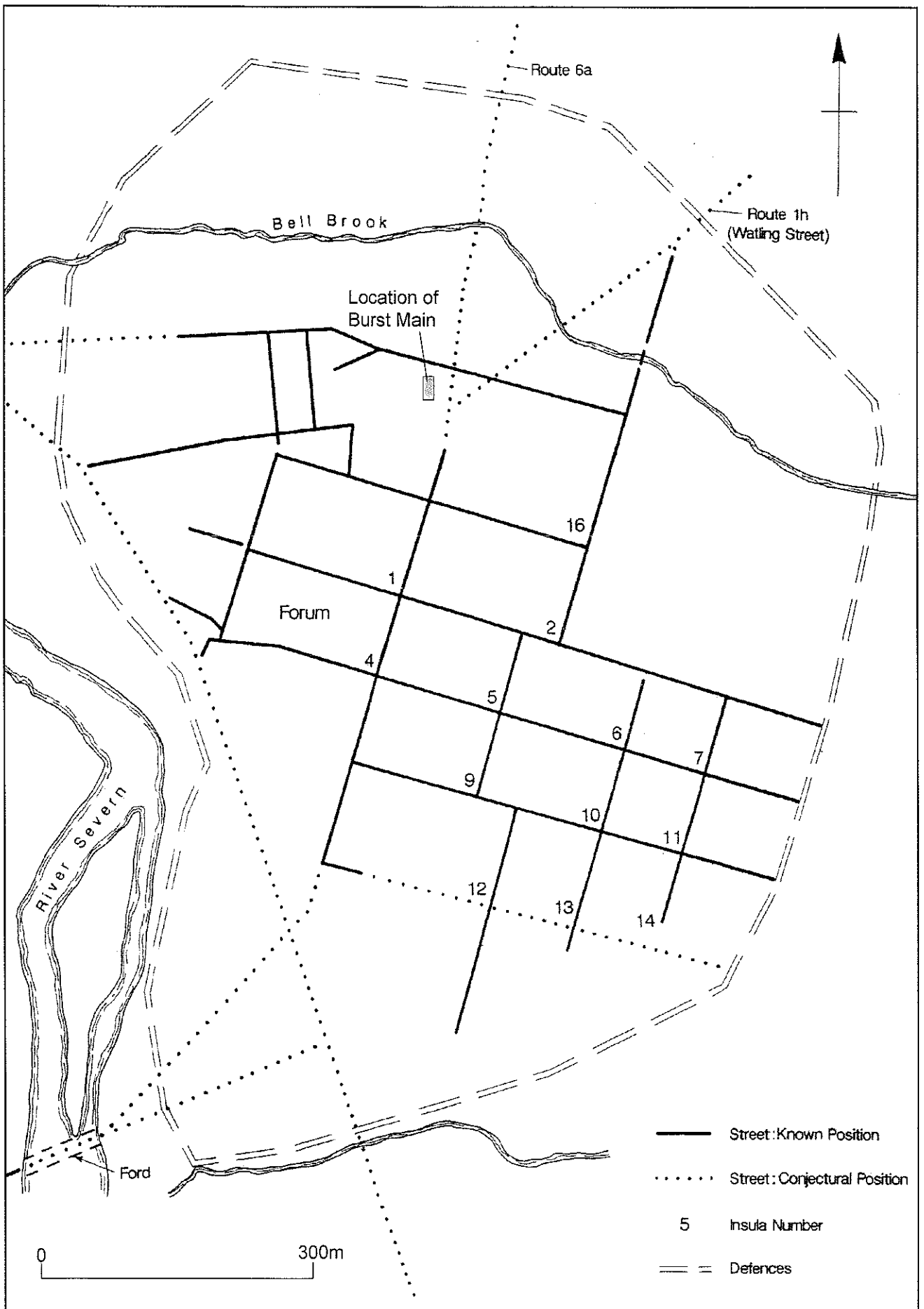


Fig.3

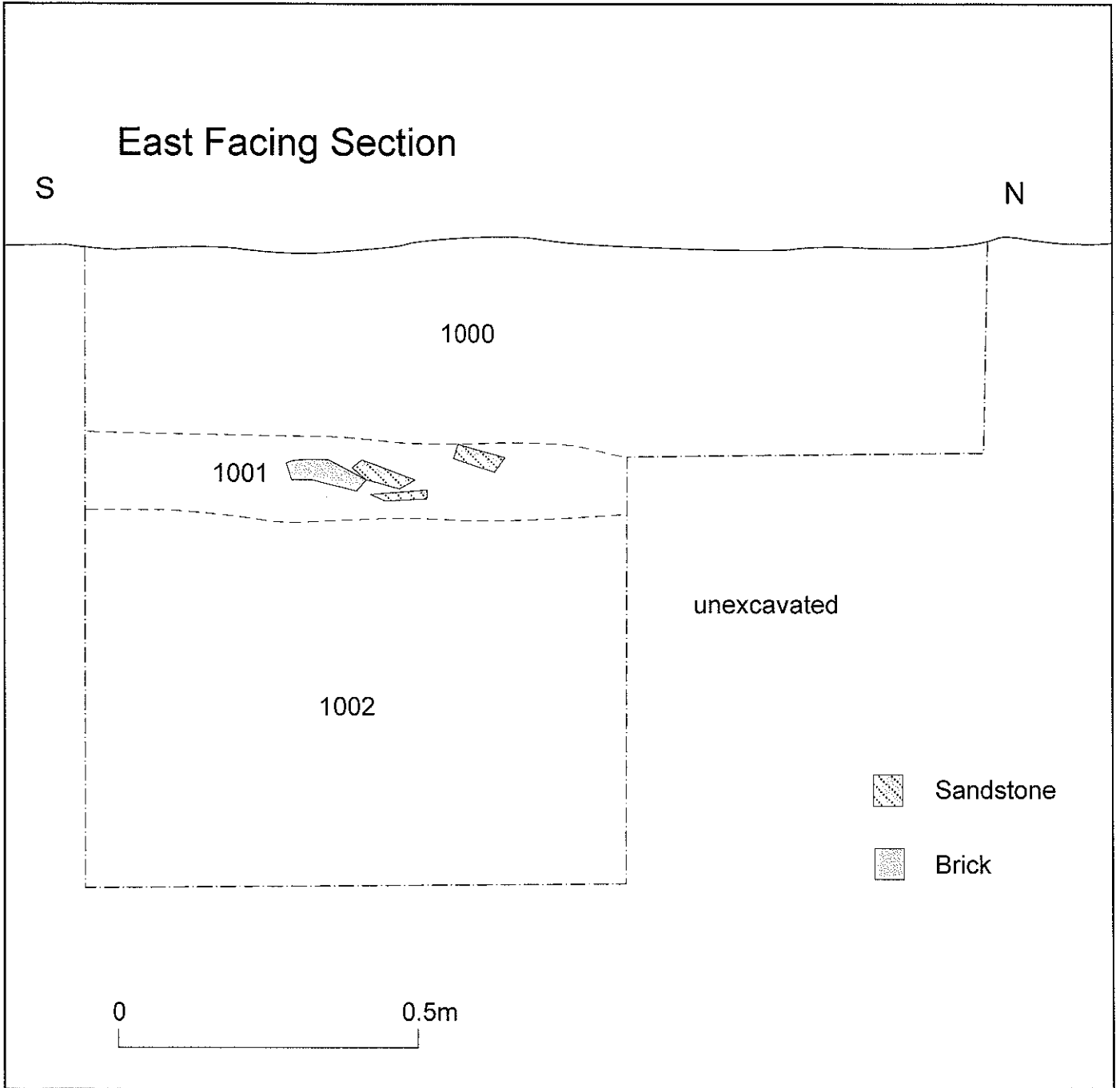


Fig.4